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On "predatory" publishing: A reply to Maistry

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Abstract

I reply to an article in this issue of *Journal of Education* by Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry entitled, "(Re)Counting the High Cost of Predatory Publishing and the Effect of a Neoliberal Performativity Culture." In his article, Maistry confessed his "wrong-doing" in having published articles in predatory journals. He argued that he alone is to blame for his "trangressions" because academia is necessarily a critical space that demands astuteness and constant vigilance, which he failed to uphold. Through showing remorse, he hopes to restore his academic reputation, which he believes has been eroded. In my response, I address four matters: the struggle to be an ethical researcher in the neoliberal university, the contested nature of predatory publishing, peer review as a practice fraught with difficulties, and the invocation of an immanent ethics in becoming ethical. Instead of focusing only on issues of moral decline (Beall, 2012) and moral failings (Maistry, 2019), I suggest that in a digital age we should use the opportunities that open-access publishing provides for democratising academic publishing and making it as affordable to as many people as possible. This requires, as Willinsky and Alperin (2011) argued, treating the ethical domain as a realm of positive action where one goes out of one's way to help others instead of focusing on issues such as exam cheating and research fudging—in this instance, "predatory" publishing.

Keywords: ethics, morality, neoliberal, peer-review, predatory publishing

Introduction

In this article, I reply to a confessional tale narrated by Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry (2019) of his "wrongdoing"[1] in publishing five articles in the journals of a "predatory" publishing company, Kamla-Raj Enterprises (KRE), based in Delhi, India. An electronic search shows that Maistry published in the following three KRE journals: *Journal of Social Sciences, International Journal of Educational Sciences,* and *The Anthropologist*. The reason for naming the journals will become apparent later in my discussion.

[1] In his article, Maistry expressed his "wrongdoing" by referring on two occasions to his "transgression." I use scare quotation marks when referring to the two words because Maistry does not provide a convincing argument of wrongdoing or transgression.

Maistry began his confession by stating that he, and he alone, is to blame for publishing in predatory journals and that he takes full responsibility for his decisions in this regard. He stated that to claim "blissful oblivion or naivety" for publishing in predatory journals is ludicrous because "academics are expected to be astute intellectuals, inherently critical and constantly suspicious, possessing robust *scientific publishing literacy*" (Maistry, 2019, pp. 5–6). Self-blame and taking full responsibility for publishing in predatory journals is a refrain in his confessional tale. His confession also has other elements: payment, judgement, sanctions, and redemption. Maistry evidently believes that one pays (and should pay) for your "sins" through experiencing personal trauma and loss of academic and professional reputation. In his words: "Dealing with the stress and anxiety of losing one's academic reputation is the more painful price I am having to pay" (Maistry, 2019, p. 12). But, in the process of seeking redemption, he also offered to pay back[2] the R72,000 that accrued to his research cost centre from the publications in KRE journals.[3] He used "judgement" in different senses: his poor judgement to publish in the KRE journals, critique and judgement as necessary qualities of scholarship, and public judgement as a necessary precondition in the scholarly space. Besides self-judgement, Maistry stated that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was complicit for not having reviewed its journal lists periodically, and for not researching international publishing practices. He stated that the Academy of Science of South Africa was also culpable for not being "sufficiently attuned to how the neoliberal, corporate machinery is at work both nationally and internationally" (Maistry, 2019, p. 14). Moreover, Maistry implied that there is a need for sanctions—that actions need to be taken to rid the academy of the rot that is setting in—for example, that universities should reconsider nominating examiners whose curriculum vitae contain "discrediting" evidence, review the composition of higher degree committees, and that appointments of academics, senior management, and supervisors should come under scrutiny for predatory publishing. In other words, Maistry suggested that we should apply sanctions to unscrupulous individuals. Why target the individual? Because, for him, the individual should exercise due diligence (Maistry's words) when deciding where to publish. But, personally, Maistry seeks redemption through a process of confessing his "transgressions" and demonstrating remorse, which, hopefully, will lead to forgiveness and the restoration of his academic reputation.

Concerning what has been discussed above, I shall make some initial comments and then explore a few more issues in greater depth in the sections of the article that follow. Firstly, I accept that, for Maistry, his perceived loss of his academic reputation was felt—and I don't wish to minimise this sensibility. However, there is to date, no solid evidence that Maistry has lost his academic reputation—and, thankfully, he has not. I cannot comment with any

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2 In his article, Maistry referred to "paying back the money" (2019, p. 12) and hinted that this made reference to chants expressed by members of the Economic Freedom Fighters party in parliament for the former president to pay back the money that he benefitted from through corruption. Maistry implied that those who publish in predatory journals are engaging in a corrupt activity.

3 In South Africa, public universities receive approximately R100,000 (it varies from year to year) from the state per publication unit and, from this revenue source, many universities provide academics with an incentive for every publication unit they produce. This incentive is paid into a research cost centre and, at a few institutions, a portion is also paid directly to the academic as additional income. The University of KwaZulu-Natal pays an incentive of R18,000 per publication. Maistry's four publication units (two were coauthored) in KRE journals therefore amounted to 4 x R18,000 = R72,000.

authority on his reputation within his own institution but, thus far, there is little or no evidence of a loss of reputation in the broader education community. Maistry continues to be appointed as external examiner of doctoral candidates by several universities, continues to be used as a reviewer of journal articles, is invited as guest speaker and to facilitate workshops for staff and students at South African universities. He continues to perform work as a key facilitator of the Strengthening Postgraduate Studies Programme presented by Rhodes University, and continues to perform work for the Quality Council on schooling (Umalusi),[4] and so forth. The evidence suggests that his perceived loss of academic reputation is perhaps not warranted. Secondly, the self-blame expressed by Maistry, and the sanctions he proposed for individuals who have transgressed as he did, underestimate the pressure to perform and to be an ethical researcher in the neoliberal university. More importantly, Maistry did not present a sound scholarly argument for his self-blame, confession, and the implied sanctions that the academy should mete out against predatory publishing. In short, Maistry did not exercise due diligence before presenting his confessional tale. Therefore, the sanctions he proposed (and witch hunts they may induce) would be downright dangerous.

But, there are specific issues that I wish to give more attention to in my response to Maistry. First, I wish to briefly discuss the struggle to be an ethical researcher in the neoliberal university. Second, I shall discuss the contested nature of predatory publishing, and point out why Maistry (2019) presented a weak case for the position he took on it. Third, I shall critically discuss peer review by pointing out that it is fraught with difficulties. I do this because Maistry is largely uncritical of peer review. Fourth, I shall discuss the idea of becoming an ethical researcher by giving attention to the notion of an *immanent ethics* (Smith, 2011).

Being in the neoliberal university and being an ethical researcher

The reconfiguration of the contemporary university as a consequence of the (re)ascendency of neoliberal politics and policies has not escaped South African universities. The higher education landscape in the country is characterised by performativity regimes—discourses on quality assurance, efficiency, and accountability abound and, so too, modes of regulation based on rewards and sanctions. Ball (2003) pointed out that performativity produces fabrications, that is, the presentation of self within particular registers of meaning in which only certain possibilities of being have value. Moreover, the digital world that we inhabit (or inhabits us) has opened up alternative avenues for scholarly publishing. We have seen a proliferation of open-access journals, and academics are flooded with e-mails (on a daily basis) from journals inviting researchers to submit papers. In a culture of performativity, we are all victims and perpetrators and the decisions we make inevitably have moral or ethical implications.

[4] Maistry is member of the Umalusi Research Forum and the Assessment Standards Committee.

In an era of knowledge capitalism, we are seeing the relocation of power (in the production of knowledge) away from the academy to the marketplace (Brady, 2012)—creating knowledge assemblages comprising multimillion dollar companies such as Thomas Reuters (owner of the Web of Science) and Elsevier Reeds (owner of Scopus), large commercial publishing houses such as Taylor & Francis, Springer, and Elsevier, governments who measure their return on research and development spend by the number of articles published in journals listed on the master lists of Web of Science and Scopus by its universities and researchers. To this amalgam, we can add the thousands of open-access journals—some of which, needless to say, are dubious. This is the context in which Saltmarsh, Sutherland-Smith, and Randell-Moon (2011) argued that the "'ethical university' is continually placed under erasure, as managerialism and competitive individualism become entrenched as everyday, albeit contested, aspects of research activities, workplace practices and academic cultures" (p. 294). Moreover, ethical norms become realigned with a culture of performativity, and couched in terms of rewards and sanctions. The upshot of this is that academics who inhabit universities sometimes find themselves at sea; they fumble, and sometimes fall, in efforts to navigate competing and new demands.

I aver that, in the struggle to be an ethical researcher (in a neoliberal university), emphasis should not placed on moral failings but on a commitment to helps others, to take action that will make the world more just. A need to place greater emphasis on the ethical domain and not on the moral domain informs my response to Maistry, and my critical engagement with the notion of predatory publishing.

Predatory publishing: A contested terrain

Predatory publishing is a relatively new term, coined as recently as 2010 by a librarian, Jeffrey Beall,[5] who worked at the Auraria Library at the University of Colorado Denver. Beall (2012) described predatory publishing as follows:

> Predatory publishers . . . publish counterfeit journals to exploit the open-access model in which the author pays. These predatory publishers are dishonest and lack transparency. They aim to dupe researchers, especially those inexperienced in scholarly communication. They set up websites that closely resemble those of

[5] Beall has become a controversial figure in higher education. The same could be said about some of his critics. There is also controversy around his website and blog that was taken down. A response to one of Beall's opinion pieces written by his then line manager, Shea Swauger (2017), is worth reading. In his article, Swauger quoted a statement by the University of Colorado Denver in which the university contested Beall's argument that he was pressurised by the university to take down his website and blog. Moreover, the university supported Beall's academic freedom to conduct his research into predatory publishing. But, in the same article Swauger, also expressed his concern about Beall's ad hominem attacks on his critics (and vice versa). Swauger (2017) wrote:

> I have become alarmed by the acerbic nature of commentary from both Beall and his critics in the course of discussing open access and predatory publishing. When the academic community conflates a human being with something they've said, using ad hominin attacks as a way to discredit the ideas they present, the community becomes toxic. Beall has engaged in this on several occasions, in his publications, on social media, and on WorldCat. He often uses hyperbole and condescension. This is both disrespectful and unprofessional. His critics have sometimes responded in kind. To everyone involved: stop. It isn't clever; it isn't helpful. (p. 605)

> legitimate online publishers, and publish journals of questionable quality. Many purport to be headquartered in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada or Australia but really hail from Pakistan, India or Nigeria. Some predatory publishers spam researchers, soliciting manuscripts but failing to mention the required author fee (pp. 275–276).

Beall (2015) generated criteria for determining predatory open-access publishers, and generated a list of publishers and journals that he considered to be predatory—his blacklist. Pertinent here, is that Beall's blacklist included KRE publishers and all three journals that Maistry published in.

My first issue with Maistry is his uncritical acceptance of Beall's notion of predatory publishing—his criteria for classifying publishers and journals as predatory—and Beall's lists. This is despite Maistry's claim that scholars should be "astute intellectuals, inherently critical and constantly suspicious" (2019, p. 6). Nicholson (2017) pointed out that the authenticity of Beall's list has been questioned. Some of the criticisms include the following: Beall's obvious bias towards Western subscription-based publications, his disparaging approach to open-access publishing, Beall's perceptions about impact factor or number of citations of some supposedly predatory journals have been debunked, that Beall's analysis relied heavily on publishers' websites rather than on having detailed discussions with publishers (Nicholson, 2017). The latter criticism is important, and I shall return to this later. Moreover, in a recent study, Teixeira da Silva and Tsigaris (2018) modelled the false discovery rate for blacklists and conducted pre-study and post-study probability tests to determine whether a journal is predatory. They found that blacklists lack reliability and concluded that blacklists are academically invalid.

A first study that analyses the extent of predatory publishing in South Africa was conducted by Mouton and Valentine (2017). In their study, the authors claimed not to have taken Beall's list at face value but undertook a more in-depth assessment of the journals identified by Beall's classification. Mouton and Valentine (2017) disagreed with some of the journals Beall had classified as likely to be predatory and summarised the criteria that they regarded as standard publishing practice, and what they regarded as predatory. But, there is an immediate problem here. Their criteria for standard publishing practice were based on what they believed the criteria to be, and their criteria for predatory journals were based on what they found in relation to predatory publishing; these are the words they used in describing this: "We compare the criteria or rules that we believe apply to standard (and ethical) scholarly publishing practices and those that are found in predatory publishing" (Mouton & Valentine, 2017, p. 2). This does not point to rigorous work. What were their beliefs based on, and what served as the basis for what they found in predatory publishing? In the case of all three journals of KRE Enterprises that the researchers analysed, the journals show strong evidence for being predatory. This is the evidence that they provided:

> Three of the journals represented in our list (all from Kamla-Raj Publishers)—the *International Journal of Education Sciences*, the *Journal of Human Ecology* and the *Journal Social Sciences*—are examples of blatant false claims in regard to the

> members of their editorial boards. For example, Prof. Kenneth Kennedy who is listed as an editorial board member of the *Journal of Human Ecology* died in 2014 and Prof. Richard Brown who is listed as an editorial member of the *Journal of Social Sciences* died in 2003. Another telltale sign of predatory publishing is the overlap in the names of editorial board members across various predatory journals. Dr Bryan Hiebert who is also listed as an editorial member of the *International Journal of Education Sciences* is also listed as an editorial member of the *International Scholars Journal*—also identified by Beall as most likely a predatory journal (Mouton & Valentine, 2017, p. 4).

This is not strong evidence, and not rigorous research performed by Mouton and Valentine (2017). Let us just look at the reasoning that informs the example of the "telltale sign" of predatory publishing that the authors highlighted. Bryan Hiebert is on the editorial board of *Journal X*; he is also on the editorial board of *Journal Y*, which Beall says is most likely a predatory journal. Therefore, there is strong evidence that *Journal X* is a predatory journal. This is ludicrous. Mouton and Valentine (2017) evidently did not use the full set of criteria that they constructed (that they "found") and apply them to a journal or journals so that there was sound basis for determining whether there was strong or weak evidence of predatory publishing and how that inference would be made. Instead, what they did was to select only certain criteria and apply only one or two of them to a journal or suite of journals, and also used poor evidence to align with the selected criteria.

Another weakness of Mouton and Valentine's (2017) work and that of Beall is that they mainly used websites as their source of data, and did not engage in detailed conversations with the publishers of the journals. What is missing in much of the research conducted on predatory publishing is qualitative data on what the publishers have to say, and what academics who have published in these journals have to say about their experiences. This brings me to another weakness of Maistry's (2019) confession. If you going to confess, then tell it all. What Maistry did not provide us with are the details of his communication with the journal (what the review process entailed, etc) so that we could gain a sense of the rigour of the editorial and publishing process. If the process was dodgy, then he should have shared this detail with the reader—as well as if the process had been very rigorous. In the one instance where he did tell us something about the review process, he said the guest editor "followed a due peer-review protocol" (Maistry, 2019, p. 11). We might have gained useful insight from a more detailed confession from Maistry.

However, of my 200+ publications, I published one article in a predatory journal and, incidentally, a KRE journal, *Journal of Human Ecology* (le Grange, 2015), which both Beall as well as Mouton and Valentine (2017) viewed as likely (strongly) predatory. Here is my tale (and it is not a confessional tale).

In 2014, I was looking to publish my work on ubuntu and deep ecology in a different geography to where I had published and shared my work on this theme. I wished that my work would be accessible to different audiences. I had published in "prestigious" Taylor & Francis journals on ubuntu and environmental education, and had shared my work at

universities and at conferences in the Anglophone world. I wanted to be sure that I published in an accredited journal so that both my university and I could benefit from the subsidy that would accrue. I scanned through all the lists of accredited journals approved by the DHET and, on the IBSS list, I found a journal called the *Journal of Human Ecology*, which I thought fitted my topic perfectly (ubuntu ecology and human ecology). I submitted the article to the journal via e-mail. The fee to publish was about 250 US dollars (about R3,600).[6] This is less than the page fees charged by South African journals and substantially less than the 3,000 US dollars (R43,200) charged by Taylor & Francis to have an article published open access. In my assessment, I got my bang for my buck. The review process went as follows: I was asked by the journal to nominate potential reviewers and I did;[7] I don't know whether the journal used these reviewers or not but my article was reviewed by three reviewers through a process of double-blind review. After I submitted the revised version, based on the receiving feedback from reviewers, I was requested to make further (relatively) minor revision to the text, which I assumed the editorial team had requested. The article was published about a year after I submitted the first draft. Importantly, I achieved my goal because this work was (and is) read by scholars who had not read my work before, and a spin-off was that I was invited to write a contribution on ubuntu for a post-development dictionary that will be published in 2019.

On the whole, the peer-review process was rigorous—as in the case of any reputable journal. Most importantly, my self-assessment is that the quality of this article is no different to the quality of articles published in so-called reputable journals. This raises questions about both Beall's as well as Mouton's and Valentine's (2017) finding. But this is, of course, anecdotal evidence. My experience is, however, supported by Taylor & Francis who signed a co-publishing agreement with KRE in 2017. It would be fair to assume that Taylor & Francis did its due diligence before signing an agreement with KRE. This is what Jane Buffham of Taylor & Francis said to Denise Nicholson in a personal communication on the matter:

> T&F entered into a partnership with KRE in 2017 after many months of careful research and engagement. We have full confidence in the integrity of this publisher and are delighted to be working with them to support their portfolio of titles. We certainly would not enter any partnership with any publisher we deem to be "predatory" or who did not share our commitment to upholding the highest standards of publishing ethics.
>
> We are aware of the KRE inclusion on the Beall's list, but having raised this directly with the site, we found the reasoning for the inclusion of KRE to be insubstantial and unmerited. Suffice to say we wholeheartedly disavow the decision to include KRE here.
>
> Beall's list has, as you say, ceased to exist. Further pursuit of expunging KRE from a site that no longer exists is unfortunately an impossibility. I'm aware that archives are

[6] The conversion is based on a rand/dollar exchange rate of 14.4.

[7] Such an approach could be advantageous or disadvantageous. An author could nominate soft, but also the best persons working on the topic.

> still available unofficially, but since these are not curated or maintained or have any recourse to amendment, they cannot be seen as reliable; it would be unfair to use these against KRE in our opinion. (as cited in Nicholson 2017, p. 60)

The views expressed by Buffham in a personal communication are corroborated by information that appears on the Taylor & Francis website. This is what appears on their website:

> From 2017 onwards, Taylor & Francis will co-publish fifteen of Kamla-Raj Enterprises' highly regarded journals.
>
> Kamla-Raj Enterprises will continue to publish the journals in print and distribute them within the SAARC region. The Taylor & Francis Group will co-publish the journals online, manage international subscriptions and market the journal globally.
>
> The following journals will be co-published in this publishing partnership:
>
> • International Journal of Educational Sciences
> • International Journal of Human Genetics
> • Journal of Agricultural Sciences
> • Journal of Biodiversity
> • Journal of Communication
> • Journal of Economics
> • Journal of Human Ecology
> • Journal of Life Sciences
> • Journal of Psychology
> • Journal of Social Sciences
> • Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology
> • Studies on Ethno-Medicine
> • Studies on Home and Community Science
> • Studies of Tribes and Tribals
> • The Anthropologist. (Informa, 2017)

We might wish to question the bona fides of Taylor & Francis but their statements, and my anecdotal tale, must at least cast further doubt on Beall's as well Mouton and Valentine's (2017) research findings. Moreover, it brings into question the very assumptions on which Maistry's (2019) confession is based.

A more serious issue with Beall's, Mouton and Valentine's, and Maistry's work is that they committed a category mistake when invoking the term, predatory publishing—predatory publishing is a misnomer. In response to an article by Beall, Swauger (2017) argued that predatory publishing is at once a larger and smaller problem than Beall claimed. He pointed out that, although he holds that there are legitimate threats to science, he disagrees that predatory publishing holds the gravity that Beall suggested—and I would add, what Mouton and Valentine (2017) as well as Maistry (2019) suggested. Swauger (2017) pointed out that

while predatory publishing (Beall's coinage) is relatively new, the category of problem it fits into is not. He averred that evaluating the credibility of a publisher or journal is an exercise in evaluating the credibility of an information source. Furthermore, Swauger (2017) noted that it is not easy to evaluate how credible or authoritative a source is because the answers to such questions are constructed and contextual. He wrote:

> Just because something was published in a predatory journal doesn't mean that it's false or poor research. Just because something was published in a prestigious close-access journal doesn't mean that it is true or excellent. Authority isn't about the containers that information comes in, and the solution was never a list of bad containers. (Swauger, 2017, p. 604)

Focusing on the containers is an easy exercise and leads to easy decisions (though dangerous) that categorise journals as predatory or not. This is what Beall, Mouton and Valentine, as well as Maistry do. What is required by all of us who engage in academic publishing in a contemporary era is to enhance our information literacy so that we are able to judge what is authoritative. Furthermore, we should not implement sanctions, criminalise academics, and so forth, based on assumptions informed by weak research (perhaps even dubious research) and, by so doing, commit a category error by making the unit of analysis the container—and not what is in the container. Maistry's (2019) implied sanctions, and Mouton and Valentine's (2017) recommendations to organisations like the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the National Research Foundation (NRF) are downright dangerous and can destroy academics' careers. For example, an instruction to NRF rating reviewers to comment on whether the author has published in predatory journals is problematic because it could lead to prejudicial judgements about the container, and not the quality of the research represented in the container. To come back to Maistry (2019)—his confessional tale may be based on flawed presuppositions.

Peer review has never been a fixed system and is fraught with difficultly

My brief discussion on peer review is because Maistry quite uncritically valorised it as if it were sacrosanct and a fixed institution. These are some of the statements that Maistry (2019) made:

> Such academics value the rigour of the peer-review process (whether blind, double-blind, single-blind, or open) and understand that an important conduit for knowledge dissemination is through publication. That this profundity has eluded the average South African academic is indeed a moot point. (p. 15)

> In academia, credibility and integrity are earned via the peer-review process. (p. 17)

> Peer review, [which is] standard best practice in the world of knowledge production and dissemination. (p. 7)

In an opinion piece, Beall (2017) shared what he learned from predatory publishing. In the article, he wrote about a history of scholarly publishing where authority and credibility were known as stable. Beall (2017) lamented the decline of scholarly publishing as a consequence of predatory publishing and wrote:

> At that time [where authority and credibility were known and stable], most journals were generally respected and of good quality, and peer review was taken seriously and managed well (p. 273)
>
> The once-proud scholarly publishing industry is in a state of rapid decline (p. 277).

In an article published in the journal, *Nature*, Csiszar (2016) traced pivotal moments in the history of academic refereeing and pointed out that its history is recent, that peer review did not develop because of scientists' need to trust one another but as consequence of political demands for public accountability. Contrary to Beall, he pointed out that peer review was never a fixed institution and that the imagined functions of this institution are in flux. In a direct response to Beall, Swauger (2017) pointed out the Beall's statements depict a publication system that he contended never existed. He wrote:

> The history of scholarly publishing is less a meritocracy of ideas and more a reflection of who held privilege in society. Access to at least one, and often multiple, intersections of privilege were almost a requisite for being considered to join in the scholarly conversation. Who and what got published was largely determined by established power structures that favored maleness, whiteness, cis-gendered heterosexuality, wealth, the upper class, and Western ethnocentrism. (Swauger, 2017, p. 603)

Even though this is still largely the case, Maistry was silent on the politics of scholarly publishing and peer review as an institution. Furthermore, the ethics of peer review has come under the spotlight and there are doubts as to the integrity of the current system (for a detailed account, see Cawley, 2011). In his article, Cawley (2011) identified nine ethical flaws with the peer-review system that currently dominates academic publishing, and then formulates a principle to address each of these ethical flaws that could be the basis of an alternative peer-review system. I shall mention only the first ethical flaw that he outlines, as an example. The first ethical flaw relates to anonymity. Cawley (2011) pointed out that anonymity completely protects the reviewer from any consequences for an unethical act and also protects the reviewer from being incompetent. Anonymity enables reviewers to steal an author's ideas and results, delay a paper to allow publication of their own, and so forth. With respect to anonymity, Cawley said that a principle of an ideal ethical peer-review system is:

> In an ideal ethical system of peer review, the reviewers must be made known to the reviewed and to the public. They should be identified by name, affiliation, discipline and speciality. (2011, p. 206)

As mentioned, Cawley did the same for eight other ethical flaws, and formulated eight principles of an ideal ethical peer-review system for each of the ethical flaws. There is, unfortunately, no space to elaborate on them here. The point of this brief discussion on peer review is that the system is not as sacrosanct and stable as Maistry implied; it has never been a fixed institution, it has ethical flaws and therefore should be renegotiated. This brings me to a discussion of being and becoming an ethical researcher.

Some parting thoughts: Becoming an ethical researcher

Smith (2011) argued that an immanent ethics draws the distinction between ethics and morality. Morality is defined as a set of constraining rules that guide and judge our actions and intentions. Janning (2015) averred that moralistic questioning aims at leading one in the right direction and that the direction has already been defined before the question is asked. He stated that, in contrast, ethics is a set of assisting rules that help one in evaluating what one is doing, thinking, and feeling "according to the immanent existence it implies" (Janning, 2015, p. 495). Morality asks, "What ought we to do?" whereas ethics asks, "What might we do?" (Janning, 2015, p. 495).

Not only did Beall and Maistry base their arguments on flawed assumptions, but they placed emphasis on the domain of morality and therefore do not address matters of ethics and what it means to be an ethical researcher. Beall lamented what he perceived to be a moral decline vis-à-vis scholarly publications, and Maistry (2019) confessed his transgressions (his moral failings) and sought redemption. In doing so, they did not give attention to the importance of being ethical—instead of valorising current (or past) peer-view systems they (and all of us) should ask what can we do to make the peer-review system more ethical (just).

At the time of making final changes to this article, I received myriads of WhatsApp notifications of articles that expressed the public's outcry about recently published research authored by researchers associated with Stellenbosch University's Department of Sport Science. The article authored by Niewoudt, Dickie, Coetsee, Engelbrecht, and Terblanche (2019) entitled, "Age- and Education-Related Effects on Cognitive Functioning in Colored South African Women" was published in the journal, *Aging, Neuropsychology, and Cognition.* The online publication appeared on 28 March 2019. Following the public outcry, condemnation from several quarters, and a petition signed by more than 2,000 academics and members of the broader public, the article was retracted by the journal and the authors. Most of the criticism focused on the ethics of the research published. The article was published in a journal that is deemed reputable; it was published by Taylor & Francis, employed double-blind peer review, was indexed in Scopus and the Social Sciences Citation Index, and so forth. The article would be judged to have met the best standards of academic quality because the container ticks all the right boxes—it would meet Beall's and Mouton and Valentine's criteria for academic publishing. Yet, the article was judged by many to have not met the criterion of ethical adequacy (and possibly other criteria)—the contents of the container have been judged to be flawed. The case highlights the limitation of focusing quality criteria on the container of academic articles, the inadequacy of peer review, and the importance of doing

ethical research in an unequal world. The latter relates to doing and reporting research that enhances life (both human, and more-than-human) more than ensuring that research is metrically adequate. It concerns not doing research on or about people, but doing research with people (or the more-than-human world)—in intra-action with others—research where, as researchers, we are part of the world of those who participate in the research we do. Moreover, when we judge research, we should place emphasis on the contents of the container rather than the container itself.

To return to Maistry's emphasis on the domain of morality and predatory publishing. Willinsky and Alperin (2011) suggested that we should treat the ethical domain as a realm of positive action, which means that we go out of our way to help someone instead of focusing on their (and our own) moral failings. This would mean shifting the angle of vision by not focusing on failings related to open-access publishing, but finding opportunities that open access affords so as to provide access to as many people as possible at low cost. This does not mean condoning counterfeit publishers who scam academics and students.

If I am to say anything about goats, it is that we should not use the containers that hold information as scapegoats for the labour required to judge what is authoritative in academic publishing. There is a Belgian adage, "If you put a silk dress on a goat, he's still a goat"—a poor article is a poor article irrespective of the container you put it in. So too, is the case with an excellent article.

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